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ABSTRACT

A feasibility study examined ways in which Britain's Further Education Unit's (FEU's) work regarding the learning disabled could be enhanced by involvement in the program at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD). The study recommended the following: (1) the United Kingdom should become involved in the OECD/CERI program; (2) a project based on the role of intra-agency cooperation in facilitating the empowerment of young people with disabilities should be coordinated by FEU; (3) the project should be composed of subprojects centered on the three identified areas of work (applications of new technologies, supported employment, and planning transition to and within adult life); (4) the project should recommend future interagency collaboration that would support young disabled people during their transition to adult life; and (5) the project should be managed by a consultative committee representing all the agencies involved in the project and those interested in its outcomes. This study's methodology involved meetings, interviews, and visits among a group of influential agencies and individuals working in each of the chosen areas, with emphasis on discussions of present work as it relates to young people's transition into an active adult life. (The recommended project was subsequently undertaken.) (CML)

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Bulletin No. 1

This is the first in a series of three bulletins describing the establishment, process and outcomes of the UK contribution (FEU project RP510) to the Disabled Action Programme undertaken by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD). The project looks particularly at the role of interagency collaboration in the development of young people with disabilities as they move into active adult life.

This first bulletin describes the feasibility study undertaken for the project and outlines the issues it identified.

The second bulletin will describe the elements of the substantive project and give details of work being undertaken, and the last bulletin will draw together the work of the project and analyse its findings.

The final project reports will be launched nationally in December 1989 at a conference in London.

Transition to Adult Life

for people with disabilities

Background to the feasibility study

In 1988 it was felt that the time was right for the UK to become more active in the international field of disability, and the DES invited FEU to undertake the formation, co-ordination and management of the UK contribution to the new CERI Action Programme "Supporting Active Life for Young People with Disabilities".

FEU, having consulted members of its Special Needs Advisory Committee and HMI, undertook to explore the feasibility of a project based on three elements of the CERI initiative:

- the application of new technologies in support of the learning disabled;
- strategies for supported employment;
- planning transition to and within adult life.

A study was undertaken to examine ways in which existing work within these three target areas could be enhanced, and outcomes co-ordinated, by involvement in the CERI programme. The focus of any project arising from the study would be on the value of interagency collaboration in the empowerment and sustained support of any young people with disabilities as they make the transition into active adult life. A decision was taken that work would be considered only if it were likely that some additional funding and the value of being part of the project would produce outcomes within a timescale that matched the other CERI activities.

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The study had to be conducted within one month to enable the UK, if a project were feasbile, to achieve its outcomes within the timescale already set for other OECD work. It was therefore not exhaustive. It aimed to produce a state-of-the-art overview of work in the three selected areas and to identify issues which could be addressed through interagency collaboration co-ordinated and managed by FEU.

Methodology of the feasibility study

A group of influential agencies and individuals working in each of the chosen areas was identified. Meetings, interviews and visits were then arranged to discuss present work in the field of disability as it related to young people's transition into an active adult life. Suggestions and recommendations were sought for work that could be included in the project.

Issues identified by the feasibility study

In each of the three areas focused on by the study, the most pressing issue was the overall lack of co-ordination between and across periods of transition in the lives of young people with disabilities.

- Services for young people with different disabilities do not share information, strategies or resources and so provision is duplicated and expertise lost. People with more than one disability may also find that this lack of co-ordination results in a poor service.

- Transition is not understood as a legitimate process and so schools, further education, higher education, employment, etc. operate independently, as though young people come from nowhere and disappear at the end of their time in that phase. Few links backwards and forwards are made, and record-keeping practices reflect this.

- Institutions or services within a phase do not often co-operate officially and so curriculum development or other work is carried out in FE colleges which either duplicates work being done in neighbouring colleges or could be carried out much more effectively as a co-operative effort. Much laborious 'reinventing of the wheel' takes place, as does underuse of valuable resources.

- Developments are all to often separate so that strands of work which could combine, such as the development of aids and adaptations which enable individuals with a disability to gain access to microtechnology and the development of teaching and learning programmes, do not come together and maximise their potential.

- Information is fragmented to such an extent that this is a positive barrier to young disabled people being able to make decisions in their own lives. It is only on the basis of having a range of high quality up-to-date information available and accessible that young people can be instrumental in the planning of their progress through the transition to adult life. For example, even though there are many ways in which preparation for, and entry into, employment can be achieved, too many young people with disabilities follow the one track into training or employment that is made known to them by professionals, without being aware that other opportunities exist.

- Professionals themselves rarely have access to comprehensive information.

- Parents, and their legitimate role and involvement in the lives of their children, are often disregarded or marginalised. In an attempt to precipitate young people from childhood into adulthood, it is often forgotten that it is only at the end of the transitional process that young people undergo the major separation from their parents. During the adolescent period, the separation process is still going on and parents, as well as young people with disabilities, need to be supported if the outcome is to be a genuine transition. Too often, young people with disabilities are catapulted into premature adulthood by anxious professionals.

- Support for young people with disabilities ends abruptly with the gaining of initial employment, and it is widely perceived that a substantial number of young people fail to sustain work because appropriate support has not continued beyond the getting of the job, either for the young person or the employer.

Recommendations of the feasibility study

The feasibility study recommended that:

- UK involvement in the OECD/CERI programme would be beneficial in terms of developing and sharing in the international forum;
- a project based on the role of interagency co-operation in facilitating the empowerment of young people with disabilities be co-ordinated by FEU and be placed within a coherent theoretical framework;
- the project be composed of sub-projects centred on the three identified areas of work, backed up by papers describing good practice in interagency collaboration;
- the project, besides undertaking developments in the chosen areas, should make recommendations for future interagency collaboration which would support young disabled people during their transition to adult life, particularly in the areas highlighted by the feasibility study.

The sub-projects should be concerned with:

- *The applications of new technologies*: an examination of the need to co-ordinate phases and developments in the field. Experiences of learners who have had technological support, especially at the transitions from school to college and from college to work or *other* provision, would be included.
- *Supported employment*: what kind of support would best enable young people with disabilities to retain employment? What kind of preparation for employment is most effective?
- *Planning transition*: the implications for parents of the development of advocacy and self-advocacy for young people with disabilities. What kind of support do parents want as their youngsters move into adult life?

The supporting papers should focus on:

- young people with severe and complex physical or sensory disabilities and their transition from school into higher education;
- young people who are deaf and on a vocational training programme in further education which was transferring from a segregated to an integrated setting.

A decision was taken early in the project that an existing FEU REPLAN project, 'Developing Self-Advocacy Skills with Disabled Unemployed Adults' (RP449), should be closely associated with the OECD initiative, particularly with the element concerned with advocacy and in its implications for parents and carers.

Management of the project

The feasibility study recommended that the project be managed by a consultative committee representing all the agencies involved in the project and those with an interest in its outcomes.

The substantive project

In June 1988, the DES approved the findings of the feasibility study as the basis for a UK contribution to the OECD/CERI programme and FEU began the work of setting up the substantive project. Details of the substantive project and reports on its progress will be given in the next bulletin in this series.

Other relevant FEU work

- A bulletin describing the work of the FEU REPLAN project 'Developing Self-Advocacy Skills with Disabled Unemployed Adults' (RP449) will be published in May 1989.
- A bulletin and a training pack following on from *Transition to Adulthood* (FEU, 1986) (the curriculum framework for students with severe physical disability produced by North Nottinghamshire College of Further Education) will be published later in 1989.

- *Care and Education in the Community* (Special Needs Occasional Paper No. 6, Longman for FEU, 1988) offers discussion on the need for interagency planning and delivery to meet the needs of new client groups with disabilities and describes interesting joint practice in the care in the community initiative.

Enquiries about the OECD/CERI programme and the UK contribution to it, or about other FEU work dealing with transition and interagency collaboration, should be addressed to Pat Hood, Development Officer, FEU, 2 Orange Street, London WC2H 7WE. Copies of the feasibility study for the UK contribution are also available from FEU.

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Relevant OECD/CERI publications

Young People with Handicaps: The Road to Adulthood OECD/CERI, 1986

Disabled Youth: The Right to Adult Status OECD/CERI, 1988

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